

FIGHTING RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Portraits of Hate, Lessons of Hope



Lesson Plan: Overview of Religious Intolerance Using Sexuality and Family/Gender Norms

Objectives:

- The student will be able to define what religious intolerance is and how themes of sexuality have been used as tools of persecution.
- The student will be able to recognize themes of intolerance in the images.
- The student will be able to articulate why religious intolerance exists against various groups by using images to support their claims.

Activities:

- Introductory lesson on Sexuality and how it has been used in the history of religious intolerance in America. See provided information sheet.
- Begin class with 2-3 images from our website to initiate discussion, observing ways that sexuality and family/gender norms are used to persecute religious groups which step outside the boundaries of what the majority considers to be normal.
- Using the worksheets as guides, have students work in groups to present one of the images to the class representing persecution based on the theme of sexuality.
- Pick one image individually and write a comprehensive essay explaining the image and elements of intolerance which are presented.
- Concluding Discussion Questions – Why are sexuality and family/gender norms often used as tools of persecution? Which groups have been targeted using this method of persecution? What are the implications of sexuality being used as a tool of persecution? Are any of the same methods of persecution using sexuality used today?

Assessments:

- In-class responses to worksheet questions.
- Participation in class discussion.
- Personal reflection on themes of intolerance, focusing on the use of sexuality and family/gender norm violations as tools of persecution. (Possible rubric provided.)

Sexuality Background

Sexuality is firmly ingrained into the fears that fuel religious intolerance. Sexuality is defined as the quality or state of being sexual; the condition of having sex; sexual activity; expression of sexual receptivity or interest especially when excessive. One's sexuality is judged and scrutinized in light of their particular to religion—often the sexual practices of “other” religions are deemed strange or dangerous. These stereotypes promote intolerance and hatred towards the specific religious groups. Sexuality and issues concerning sexuality are at the forefront of most religions; therefore, we need to be more aware of these evident prejudices that affect our society.

One example of this type of religious intolerance is seen in the Klu Klux Klan's hatred and persecution of homosexuality. It is a common KKK tactic to blame the HIV/AIDS epidemic on same sex relationships. Also, when sexual stereotypes of Catholicism abound as celibacy is seen as an “unnatural” state, one that disguises “perverse” desires. Groups and individuals promoting anti-Catholic beliefs and ideas take advantage of these stereotypes. In the nineteenth century, perpetrators of religious intolerance alleged that priests sexually abused and oppressed nuns in convents; today the practice of celibacy fuels the fire for accusations of the sexual molestation of young boys.

Family structures and gender norms are related to these fears about “deviant” sexuality. New and minority religious movements often have alternative teachings about gender roles, sexual practices, and family life. These teachings differentiate them from “mainstream” religious practice. For example, the Catholic practice of celibate priests and nuns was viewed as suspicious by the Protestant majority as it rejected the primacy of the nuclear family. This difference in opinion brought many allegations of sexual deviance upon the leadership of the

Catholic Church. Mormonism was another group that was, and still is, highly criticized for the practice of polygamy (despite the cessation of the practice in 1890). This intolerance can be seen in many of the anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon images.